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# THE RELIGIOUS AND SOCIAL IDEALS OF ISRAEL. I

BY HERBERT L. WILLETT

## AN OUTLINE BIBLE-STUDY COURSE OF THE AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF SACRED LITERATURE

*At no time in the history of the world has the attention of Christian people been drawn so critically and sympathetically to the teaching of Jesus and the partial failure of Christian people to incorporate the principles of his religion into social and individual life.*

*The principles and teaching of Jesus were definitely related to the religious and social ideals which he inherited from his Hebrew ancestors and from his spiritual predecessors, the prophets. There is no better way of emphasizing and assimilating the teaching of Jesus than by the study of the work of the prophets.*

*This course is published in nine leaflets issued on the 15th of each month from September, 1915, to June, 1916. To all members of the AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF SACRED LITERATURE enrolling for the course, these leaflets are sent without charge. The membership fee is \$0.50, plus 4 cents for postage. The amount may be sent to the headquarters of the Institute at the University of Chicago. Leaders of classes will find suggestions for their special work in the BIBLICAL WORLD beginning with this issue. The Introduction and first fifteen days' work were published in the September issue.*

### STUDY I

(Continued)

*Sixteenth day.—§ 16. Samuel's ministry: I Sam. 4:1—7:1, 2-4; 13:5; 14:52. Read I Sam. 4:1—7:1 and note that it tells the story of Philistine aggressions against Israel, the defeat of the army, the sack of Shiloh, and the experience of the Ark in the hands of the Philistines. One can see that against these powerful enemies Israel had no means of defense. Now read I Sam. 7:2-4, and see that it describes with remarkable brevity the events of a score of years. Recall that the Hebrews since their wilderness wanderings had identified the presence of Jehovah with his symbol, the Ark. During these twenty years when the Ark was on the borderland of Philistia rather than in a more central location, note that the people are said to have "mourned after Jehovah." Samuel, now living back at his old home, Ramah (read vs. 15-17), traveled about the country, and wherever he went he "judged" the people. Would you take this "judging" to be what we would ordinarily understand by that term, or a sort of combination of preaching and governing? Would you imagine that his meetings were some-*

thing like a revival and a session of court in one? Note carefully what it was that Samuel enjoined upon the people (vs. 3)—the abandonment of idolatry and faithfulness to Jehovah. (Remember in passing judgment yourself upon the people that the Baalim and the Ashtaroth were the common gods of the Canaanites among whom the Hebrews had settled and from whom they were adopting many habits of life.) The sense of unity, dependence upon Jehovah, and confidence in Samuel shown in the Mizpah episode of 7:5-14 illustrates the progress made by the nation during these twenty years. Consult a map and locate carefully all the cities of the region. Does the statement in 7:13 seem too strong, in the light of later incidents such as 13:5 and 14:52?

*Seventeenth day.*—§ 17. *Samuel and the kingship:* Judg. 17:6; 18:1; 21:25; 8:22; 9:50; I Sam. 9:1-10, 16; 8:1-22; 10:17-27. As we learn from the Book of Judges, 17:6; 18:1; 21:25, there was no king in Israel in these early days. The people tried to gain the consent of Gideon, one of their judges, to take that office, but he refused it. Read the story in Judg. 8:22; 9:50, and see how his son, Abimelech, attempted it, with tragic results. But Samuel's work had brought the people to the point of wishing a king. We have two sets of narratives dealing with Samuel's attitude toward this popular demand. Read I Sam. 9:1-10:16, the older account, and decide from it whether Samuel approved or disapproved of the choice of a king, in the view of the writer. Then read the later account in I Sam. 8:1-22; 10:17-27, and see how strong is the writer's conviction that Israel should not have a king. Would you say that the work Samuel had done led naturally to a popular wish for a stronger and more centralized government and was in reality a high compliment to Samuel's leadership?

*Eighteenth day.*—§ 18. *Samuel's defense of his administration:* I Sam. 12:1-25. Read this address carefully and compare it with those of other great leaders about to give up their work; e.g., Washington. Note the things which Samuel says cannot be charged against him. Are these the sort of tyrannies likely to be practiced by kings in all ages? What would be the qualities of such a king as Samuel would approve? Do you think this record has had any effect in shaping the world's standard of judgment regarding kings?

*Nineteenth day.*—§ 19. *Samuel's rebuke of Saul:* I Sam. 15:1-35. Amalek was a clan or tribe with which Israel had often had contests. Samuel's intense loyalty to Israel led him to believe that Jehovah wanted Amalek destroyed. Read in this passage how he sent Saul on that errand and with what merciless cruelty the work was carried out. Was it more barbarous than the custom of his time? We have seen that Samuel excelled his fellows in justice, honesty, and unselfishness as well as in statesmanship. Did he regard such cruelty as the will of God? Does this indicate that his ideal of the character of God, while far beyond that of his time in many respects, was yet very imperfect? Note that in his interview with the returning king he utters one of the most fundamental truths of religion. What applications of this great saying could you make today?

*Twentieth day.*—§ 20. *Last days of Samuel:* I Sam. 16:1-13; 19:18-24; 25:1; 28:1-25. Four later references are made to Samuel in the narrative.

Saul's kingdom came to an unhappy end and was succeeded by that of David. It was natural for the friends and biographers of the latter to wish to connect his name and government as much as possible with the great name of Samuel. Read I Sam. 16:1-13, for a tradition, no doubt widely believed, that Samuel actually had anointed David king at Bethlehem. Read also in I Sam. 19:18-24 the story of David taking refuge from the fury of King Saul, at Ramah with Samuel. These stories have many difficulties connected with them, but they reflect a current of popular feeling regarding David as the friend and protégé of Samuel. Read in I Sam. 25:1 the simple notice of Samuel's death. Do you think the public judgment was justified regarding his greatness? Why? The tradition preserved in I Sam. 28:1-25 is intended by the writer to show how Samuel was venerated even after his death.

*Twenty-first day.*—§ 21. *David and the Ark:* I Sam. 31; II Sam. (1:19-27); 5:1-12; 6:1-23. Read I Sam., chap. 31, for the story of Saul's overthrow and death, and in II Sam. 5:1-12 the account of the selection of David as king of Israel. (The ancient song, II Sam. 19-27, gives us a sidelight upon David's character.) The loyalty of King David to Jehovah and his confidence in the current belief concerning the Ark as the symbol of His presence is seen in one of his earliest projects, the removal of the Ark, or sacred chest, from its obscure resting-place to a temporary sanctuary he prepared for it in Jerusalem, his new capital city. Read carefully the narrative in II Sam. 6:1-23, and note David's deep personal concern in all that happened, even to the extent of joining in the sacred dances in honor of the Ark. It was more than official interest; it was personal devotion.

*Twenty-second day.*—§ 22. *David's house established.* II Sam. 7:1-29. As soon as David brought the Ark of God to Jerusalem, the capital, he felt the need of a suitable sanctuary in which to place it. Read the story of his plans in II Sam. 7:1-3. Nathan, the official court prophet, seems to have approved these plans, at first, but later on questioned the wisdom of building a costly central structure. See vss. 4-9. He claims that God had no need of such a building to dwell in, but that it was a noble thought of David's and, as an acknowledgment of it, God would build David a house—a family and a dynasty—that should endure. Read vss. 10-29. What social and religious considerations do you think entered into David's thought of the building of the temple?

*Twenty-third day.*—§ 23. *David and Nathan:* II Sam. 7:2; 11:1-27; 12:1-25. Nathan the prophet was a friend as well as an adviser of David. See II Sam. 7:2. Remaining at home while his army went out on a campaign, David appropriated to himself the wife of one of his captains, and, to cover his conduct, had her husband exposed to death. Read the story in II Sam. 11:1-27. Probably in any other nation of antiquity a king would have felt no compunctions of conscience at such conduct, nor would his people have protested. But in Israel there was a higher order of conscience. Read II Sam. 12:1-25, and note the fearless rebuke administered by the prophet Nathan to the king. Which do you think more notable, the fact that David should commit an act of this character,

or that he should recognize the authority of moral law in the stings of his conscience and the rebuke of the prophet?

*Twenty-fourth day.*—§ 24. *The temple dedicated:* I Kings 2:12; chaps. 4, 6, 7, 8. David's successor was his son, Solomon. See I Kings 2:12. Read the narrative in I Kings 4:1-34 to learn something of the strength and wealth of Solomon's kingdom and of his own character. What social changes would Solomon's policy bring to Israel? Read also I Kings 6:1-7:51, and you will see that among the first great enterprises undertaken by Solomon was the building of a sanctuary such as his father David had hoped to build. Continue with I Kings 8:1-66, and note how elaborate and impressive were the services of dedication and what a conspicuous part the king had in it all. Do you think that Solomon's interest lay chiefly in the promotion of a purer worship in Israel, or was he largely interested in the embellishment of his capital by such a beautiful structure?

*Twenty-fifth day.*—§ 25. *The prophets and the nation:* I Kings 11:26-12:24; 14:1-18. Read I Kings 11:26-40. Note the fact that Jeroboam of Ephraim was one of Solomon's leaders of levies, who later became a plotter against his master (vss. 26-28); that Jeroboam was encouraged by the prophet Ahijah of Shiloh to head a revolt against the power of Solomon (vss. 29-40); that Ahijah and the other prophets represented the sentiment of protest against the autocracy, centralization, and irreligion of Solomon's program and that they were unable to make headway with their project during the reign of the king. Read I Kings 12:1-20, and find the sequel. This public convocation resulted in the rejection of Rehoboam by the northern tribes and the choice of Jeroboam as their leader. Thus the prophets seem to have been willing to rend the nation asunder rather than to further jeopardize the simplicities of the older Hebrew religion and morals. Read vss. 21-24. How did the prophets of the south regard the military measures with which Rehoboam planned to bring back his rebellious subjects? May the prophets be fairly regarded as in some sense a political party? Read the strange story told in I Kings 14:1-18, which shows that Ahijah continued for many years to be a notable figure at Shiloh.

*Twenty-sixth day.*—§ 26. *The coming of Elijah.* I Kings 15:25-17:24. Read I Kings 15:25-16:34, and note the rapid change of rulers in the kingdom of Israel and the turbulence of the times. The greatest ruler of the list was Ahab, whose wife was a Zidonian princess named Jezebel. Read I Kings 17:1-24, the account of the sudden appearance of the prophet Elijah as Ahab's conspicuous opponent and the champion of the worship of Jehovah. Is there any indication that Ahab himself was not a worshiper of Jehovah? Elijah's experiences by the brook Cherith and at Zarephath, near Zidon, are old stories selected from many which must have arisen about so great a man as Elijah to show that he was under the special care and guidance of Jehovah and was regarded as Jehovah's special representative.

*Twenty-seventh day.*—§ 27. *The answer of fire:* I Kings, chap. 18. Read the story and note that it represents the contest between the worship of Jehovah,

championed by Elijah, and the Baal worship which had grown popular in Israel through the influence of Jezebel, the queen. Do you infer from the narrative that the sympathies of Ahab were against the religion of Jehovah or merely neutral? Is it possible that the incidents of this chapter represent less a single event than a long campaign, in which Elijah and the prophets of Jehovah were attempting to overthrow the idolatry, not only because of its evil moral effects, but because they saw in it the collapse of Jehovah-worship? Do you regard Elijah's treatment of the prophets of Baal as justifiable and wise? What does the demonstration of confidence in the prophet show as to the estimation in which he was really held by the people?

*Twenty-eighth day.*—§ 28. *The still, small voice:* I Kings, chap. 19. Read I Kings 19:1-14, and note that the great success achieved by Elijah at Carmel seems to have been lost through his overzeal in the slaughter of the prophets of Baal. Without that act of vengeance would Jezebel have been aroused to take revenge upon him? Does this indicate the strength of the queen's party? Is it not difficult to account for the terror and the flight of the man who had faced the king and the entire nation fearlessly? What was the meaning of the contrast between the wind, earthquake, and fire, and the still, small voice? Did it imply that prophecy ought to depend less on the sword and more upon the message of truth? Read vs. 15-21, and note the constructive prophetic program which they provide. They record also the first meeting of Elijah and his great servant and successor, Elisha.

*Twenty-ninth day.*—§ 29. *Elijah and Ahab:* I Kings, chap. 21. Read I Kings 21:1-29, and observe carefully its message regarding the responsibility of prophets like Elijah for popular justice. Elijah had become great as the champion of the national religion; now he appears as the defender of popular rights. Do you think that the will of a king could have been resisted in other ancient lands? What does the audacity of Elijah in rebuking the king for his unjust treatment of Naboth show concerning the working of a higher order of social justice in ancient Israel?

*Thirtieth day.*—§ 30. *Elisha and Jehu:* II Kings, chap. 9; 10:1-31. Read II Kings 9:1-37, and note that, after the close of Elijah's work, Elisha took his place as prophet and leader. He seems to have felt that the dynasty of Ahab offered no promise of better religion and morals in Israel, and that a new king was needed. Note the method by which he summons Jehu, a Hebrew captain, from the camp to take the kingship and stamp out the royal family and the evils of Baal-worship. Do you think the ferocity with which the prophet's program was carried out by the help of Jehu was wise and justifiable? Particularly read II Kings 10:1-31 as an example of ruthless and thoroughgoing religious reform. Can there be any doubt that the prophets of that time and the prophetic writers of later days, especially of I Kings 10:30, believed these bloody measures were entirely justifiable and necessary? How do you think they compare with the ethics of today? How do they accord with the teachings of Jesus?

*Thirty-first day.*—Review the titles of the readings for the previous days of this month. Note the fact that we have been dealing with the earliest periods

of Hebrew prophecy, regarding which the written records are less complete than in the later ages. The prophets of these early times left no such ample rescripts of their messages as did those of the great prophetic centuries which we shall soon take up. Consider also the tendency of any people to idealize the past and its heroes. May this habit affect in any way the traditions we have regarding the prophets whose work we have been studying? On the other hand, compare the high character of their teaching regarding God, the national relations to him, social justice, and personal responsibility, with the best ethical and religious teaching of contemporary peoples from 1500 to 800 B.C. In spite of the crudeness, limited views of the divine character and purpose, and drastic methods of accomplishing the ends they sought, do not these men reveal an exalted conception of religion and morality, which will admirably prepare for the more adequate ministry of later prophets?

## SUGGESTIONS TO LEADERS OF CLASSES USING THE FOREGOING COURSE

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BY GEORGIA L. CHAMBERLIN

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### INTRODUCTORY

Modern religious education is seeking to bring to people of the present day the ideals which will most quickly and effectively work out into social uplift and religious inspiration for all the world. Unquestionably the simple teaching of Jesus is the supreme summary of principles upon which our modern life must rest. The very simplicity of this teaching, however, seems at times to hinder its application to the complexities of our modern civilization. There is nothing which so deepens our respect for the teaching of Jesus and our understanding of it as a study of the ethical and spiritual progress of the Hebrews, under the leadership of their great teachers, who faced daily problems different in environment from those of modern times, but produced by the same inherent weaknesses in human nature, coupled with failure to comprehend the true character of God.

It is the purpose of the course of study which these suggestions accompany to give to classes, through their own study of the biblical literature, a conception of the growth of those religious ideals which were earlier than the days of Jesus, and which prepared the way for his work. These are studied, however, not simply historically, but with the express intention of showing how similar to our own problems were those of the prophets, and how valiantly and with what self-denying courage these men of Israel presented their views to the people of their own times, even as great leaders today, with a vision of truth, give even life itself in their efforts to bring others to their point of view.

The studies are arranged in daily portions in order that those who are working alone may have a specific task for each day. Those who will work in clubs may follow the same plan or may group the work in one period. If the meeting of